




Speech By  
**Jennifer Howard**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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**CHILD DEATH REVIEW LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (2.40 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the Child Death Review Legislation Amendment Bill. A death of an innocent child always raises questions: how could this have happened, who is responsible, who is accountable for this death and what could we have done to protect the child from fatal injury or neglect? For vulnerable children who are known to Child Safety the questions become more urgent and profound as these children are known to be at greater risk.

The community are rightly angered when a child known to Child Safety dies and they rightly demand answers and accountability to prevent more of these types of deaths happening in the future. Not answering these questions and ignoring the matter only puts other children at risk and it compromises the community's confidence and trust in government agencies.

Child Safety Services do an outstanding job in keeping children safe in Queensland and their staff do amazing work in handling sometimes very challenging and traumatic cases. However, it takes a whole-of-community effort to keep children safe. It is a shared responsibility between the community and government agencies including Health, Police, Child Safety, our schools and community organisations.

Following the death of a child known to Child Safety, the community expects the government to do something that will help these agencies provide improved supports to vulnerable, at-risk children. That is why following the tragic death of Mason Jett Lee in 2016 the Premier requested the Queensland Family and Child Commission to oversee the reviews being undertaken by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and the Department of Health. The key findings from the QFCC's report that followed highlighted a number of failings. For instance, reviews into deaths of children known to Child Safety are not sufficiently independent and do not deliver whole-of-system changes that the agency needs to protect children.

It also found that other agencies involved prior to the child's death are not mandated to conduct internal reviews after the child's death and, furthermore, that Queensland does not yet have a contemporary, best practice child death review model in comparison with other jurisdictions. Importantly, it found information sharing and collaboration between agencies needs greater improvement.

The QFCC found that reviews undertaken by individual agencies were being done in isolation and findings from those reviews were not being shared with other agencies. This gives rise to wasted opportunities for whole-of-system improvements. The primary point is that it is not just the responsibility of one agency to look after a child; protecting a child is everyone's business.

This bill implements the single recommendation of the QFCC's review, that is, to consider a revised, external and independent model for reviewing the deaths of children known to the child protection system and to give effect to the government's commitment to develop a new, independent model for reviewing child death cases.

The protection of children to avoid untimely death through neglect or harm means that we do need a model of review that is truly independent and focuses on continual learning and improvement of our systems, policies, practices and legislation right across the board. Child Safety Services may have statutory responsibility to protect Queensland children, but all agencies providing services to children have a duty of care to keep children safe. This bill will require Queensland Health, Department of Education, Queensland Police and the Department of Youth Justice to conduct an internal review of their involvement with the child if the child is subject to review by Child Safety and was known to the relevant agencies during the preceding 12 months.

In the period 2018-19, 58 children who were known to Child Safety died in Queensland. Six of these deaths were from a fatal assault and neglect and 14 were from suicide. These are children who had their whole lives ahead of them and we must do better. Many of these children were in the school system and they were known by police, Youth Justice, health services and other organisations. They were known to be vulnerable and in danger. I am certain many people close to them spoke up and reported their concerns to the relevant agencies, so it is only right that we bring other government agencies into the child death review process so that we can shed light on what system-wide changes we need to implement to keep children safe and prevent more deaths. It is the least we can do to protect the most vulnerable children in our community.

I am proud that our society has come such a long way from ignoring child abuse in our homes and institutions. Too many kids in previous generations died or suffered in silence and many turned a blind eye to this. The great cultural shift in recognising the rights of children has culminated in a series of reforms over the past several decades and includes child protection reforms delivered by the Palaszczuk government since 2015. These reforms are seeing results, with 600 new Child Safety staff added since 2015 and 23,079 Child Safety cases completed in 2018-19. Child safety officers are intervening earlier to work more intensively with families to de-escalate risks to children's safety and help families keep their children safe.

Queensland also has the lowest rate of children subject to care and protection orders, with only 8.9 children per 1,000 children under orders compared with the national average of 10.6 children. Our reforms are also reducing the number of children in care and improving outcomes for children in the child protection system at all stages of their lives. We also have wonderful programs for children transitioning from the child protection system to adulthood. We all know that once a child turns 18 they do not suddenly become an adult, and it can be daunting for a child in care without the usual supports of close family. There are wonderful programs out there such as Life Without Barriers' Next Step After Care program, which is helping young people in the child protection system make that transition to independent adulthood. Our government is supporting their journey with the investment of \$5.5 million last year in the Next Step After Care services and by investing an additional \$2.5 million over the next three years to support young people during and after their transition to adulthood.

I do want to take the opportunity to congratulate the staff at Ipswich Child Safety and Life Without Barriers along with their group of fellow youth advisers for the fantastic job they did organising the Transition to Adulthood Expo held in Ipswich last October. This expo ran a range of displays on housing, education, training and transport—basically all the things that kids in care need to know to feel more in control of their future lives after care. I am proud to share with the House that this expo recently won an Ipswich City Council Australia Day award for Community Event of the Year. It is a wonderful achievement and I wish to congratulate all the people involved in making it a success. It is just one example of bringing agencies together to share in a commitment to make child protection everyone's business. This bill highlights that point. It will also put into focus our commitment to shared responsibility for child protection through accountability measures such as expanded child death review requirements for all agencies and establishing the new independent Child Death Review Board.

I would also like to acknowledge the work done by the Queensland Family and Child Commission in recommending this reform, and I thank the Attorney-General and the Premier for their continued commitment to child protection reform in Queensland. I would also like to especially thank all Queensland government agency workers in Child Safety, Health, Police, Youth Justice and the many others out there who work tirelessly to keep Queensland children safe from harm. I meet regularly with these people in my electorate. I am always in awe of their commitment and dedication to the future of our children. I commend the bill to the House.